
TONTO PLAN REVISION

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Table of Questions

Why is the Tonto revising its Land Management Plan?	2
What is a Forest Plan?	2
How will the draft forest plan differ from the 1985 plan?	2
What are the goals of the draft forest plan?	2
What are the components of the draft forest plan?	3
How was the draft forest plan developed?	4
How are public opinion and community needs considered in this process?	5
What is NEPA?	5
What is an EIS?	5
How were alternatives developed and analyzed?	6
What were the alternatives examined in the draft environmental impact statement?	6
What does the EIS process consist of?	7
How were federally recognized tribes included in this process?	8
How does the draft forest plan address the need to support the local economy?	8
How will the draft forest plan support ecosystem resilience?	8
How does the draft forest plan support the persistence of at-risk and native species?	8
How will the draft forest plan protect key ecosystem services?	9
Under the draft forest plan, how will the Forest manage recommended wilderness?	9
Under the draft forest plan, how will the Forest manage recreation?	9
Under the draft forest plan, how will the Forest support traditional and cultural ways of life?	10
How will the transition between the 1985 plan and the draft forest plan take place?	10
What's next?	10



Why is the Tonto revising its Land Management Plan?

[The National Forest Management Act](#) (NFMA) of 1976 requires forest plans to be periodically revised — usually every 15 years. Signed in 1985, the Tonto National Forest’s current land management plan is over 30 years old and has been amended 31 times. It is prescriptive, inflexible, and redundant with law, regulation, and policy. It does not provide management direction for resources such as cultural, historic, and traditional uses and does not account for sustainable recreation with the growing population of Maricopa County. In addition, the guidance in the [2012 Planning Rule](#) directs land management plans to be science-based and developed with extensive public involvement and collaboration throughout the revision process.

What is a Forest Plan?

A land and resource management plan, or forest plan, provides a general conceptual framework to guide a forest in managing its resources, goods, and services. Described as “the view from 30,000 feet”. Forest plans are intentionally strategic and broad in scope and provide guidance in the decision-making process involved with site-specific projects. Forest plans are consistent with and do not override law, regulation, or established policy.

How will the draft forest plan differ from the 1985 plan?

The draft forest plan follows guidelines laid out in the 2012 Planning Rule. Based on this guidance, the draft forest plan will:

- Have a stronger focus on outcomes rather than outputs;
- Base management actions on the best available science and local knowledge;
- Have the ability to adapt to changing conditions, trends, and stressors over time;
- Use enhanced public participation throughout the plan revision process; and
- Incorporates species of conservation concern as part of at-risk species.

Additionally, the revised land management plan provides a focus on communities in and around the forest and their traditional and cultural uses. The plan emphasizes partnerships with other federal agencies; communities; local, state, and tribal governments; and other collaborators. It also emphasizes ecological restoration from an “all-lands,” integrated resource standpoint.

What are the goals of the draft forest plan?

The Tonto National Forest [draft land management plan](#) (draft forest plan) aspires to create a shared vision for the future of our public lands by providing strategic guidance for managing cultural and natural resources on the forest, balancing multiple uses, connecting people to the land, and restoring ecosystems. It will provide strategic, program-level guidance for management of the Tonto National Forest’s resources and uses over the next 10-15 years including recreation, grazing, timber, and mining activities.



What are the components of the draft forest plan?

The land management plan provides a general, conceptual framework that will guide the Tonto National Forest in managing its resources, goods, and services. Described as “the view from 30,000 feet,” land management plans are intentionally strategic and broad in scope and provide guidance to the decision-making process involved with site-specific projects. Land management plans are consistent with and do not override law, regulation, or established policy. The revised land management plan contains plan components and other content that reflect the key roles and contributions of the forest and the identified “needs to change” in revising the 1985 plan:

- Plan components
 - Desired conditions – descriptions of specific social, economic, or ecological characteristics of the plan area, or a portion of the plan area, toward which management of the land and resources should be directed.
 - Objectives – concise, measurable, and time-specific statements of a desired rate of progress toward a desired condition or conditions based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.
 - Standards – mandatory constraints on project and activity decision-making, established to help achieve or maintain the desired condition or conditions to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet applicable legal requirements.
 - Guidelines – mandatory constraints on project and activity decisionmaking that provide flexibility for different situations, so long as the purpose of the guideline is met.
 - Suitability of lands – specific lands within a plan area that are suitable for various uses or activities based on the desired conditions applicable to those lands. The forest plan also identifies lands within the forest plan area as not suitable for uses that are not compatible. The suitability of lands need not be identified for every use or activity; however, every plan must identify those lands that are not suitable for timber production (required by the National Forest Management Act).
- Other content
 - Management approaches – convey how plan components work together to achieve the desired condition. They may also describe context, intent, priorities, partnership opportunities or coordination activities, needs to survey, inventories or assessments, or approaches to risk and uncertainty.
 - Monitoring plan – outlines the monitoring and evaluation of plan implementation to determine progress toward achieving desired conditions and objectives, and how well management requirements are being applied.

The revised land management plan is less prescriptive than the previous plan. It allows increased flexibility through an emphasis on strategic desired conditions. Standards and guidelines have been included, when necessary, to provide constraints and sideboards that ensure that projects and activities will be designed and conducted in a manner that maintains or moves the forest toward desired conditions. It



includes objectives that provide measurable, time-specific activities intended to show progress toward desired conditions and identifies probable management actions designed to achieve desired conditions.

How was the draft forest plan developed?

The Tonto National Forest has worked closely with two cooperating agencies, Arizona Game and Fish Department and Arizona Department of Agriculture throughout the plan revision process. Additionally, the Forest has engaged with 13 federally recognized tribes, other federal and state agencies, nonprofit environmental groups, and members of the general public through public and stakeholder meetings, public engagement booths, tribal meetings, and open houses.

For the first part of the plan revision process, the Tonto National Forest developed an [Assessment of Ecological, Cultural, Social, and Economic Conditions, Trends, and Risks to Sustainability](#) (published in March 2017). Current ecological and socioeconomic trends were analyzed to get a baseline for all the resources areas on the forest for future management. Based on the results of the assessment, the [Needs to Change](#) report identified the changes that are needed in the revision of the 1985 plan and three themes emerged. Relationships with our partners and volunteers are central to all three.

- **Forest-Wide Management** – the draft plan supports collaboration and partnerships, education, and monitoring across all resources and incorporates best available science, changes in trends, and use of new and emerging technologies.
- **Ecological Sustainability** – the draft plan emphasizes restoration and provides a framework for future landscape-scale projects that include diverse partnerships and relationships. The vision behind the draft plan aims to support resilient ecosystems and overall watershed health. Say anything about ecosystem services?
- **Social, Cultural, and Economic Sustainability** – The principles of sustainable recreation are embedded in throughout the draft plan. The draft plan contributes to economic prosperity and shows a commitment to sustaining traditional uses, such as fuelwood cutting, livestock grazing, timber harvesting, and mining. It values the relationships between Forest leadership and staff, and the communities that depend on the land we manage.

In November 2017 the Tonto National Forest released a [Preliminary Proposed Plan](#) to familiarize partners and the public with potential plan direction for the draft forest plan. The preliminary proposed plan was developed based on findings in the assessment and comments received on the [Notice of Intent](#) to revise the forest plan. This allowed the Tonto National Forest as well as the public and partners to better understand how the assessment and needs to change work together to develop plan direction to feed into the draft forest plan. A round of open-house meetings and one technical partner meeting were completed in order to gather feedback on the preliminary proposed plan and develop alternatives.

Following the release of the preliminary proposed plan, the Tonto worked to utilize public comments received to develop the draft forest plan. The draft forest plan is a modified version of the preliminary



proposed plan document. Additionally, comments received led to the development of alternatives analyzed in the draft environmental impact statement.

There will be additional opportunities for public involvement in the NEPA review and plan revision processes. Concurrent with the release of this DEIS, a notice of availability (NOA), published in the Federal Register initiates the formal 90-day comment period on the draft forest plan and DEIS as required by Forest Service NFMA regulations at 36 CFR 219. Comments received during the comment period will help to further refine the forest plan.

How are public opinion and community needs considered in this process?

To engage in meaningful dialogue and collaboration, the Tonto National Forest offered a variety of opportunities for involvement throughout the plan revision process, including:

- Over 40 public meetings, including community conversations, open-houses, workshops, fieldtrips and technical partner meetings.
- Since 2014, the Tonto has had direct contact with over 1,000 members of the general public to raise awareness of plan revision through outreach booths and county fairs, and numerous additional community events where we engaged both adults and youth.

Additional public meetings will be held after the release of draft documents during the official comment period to solicit more feedback. After the 90-day comment period closes, the additional information provided through comments will be analyzed. Changes to the draft forest plan and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) may be made at the discretion of the forest supervisor before these documents are finalized.

What is NEPA?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was signed into law on January 1, 1970. NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. The range of actions covered by NEPA is broad and includes making decisions on permit applications, adoption federal land management actions, and constructing publicly-owned facilities or infrastructure. Using the NEPA process, agencies evaluate the environmental and related social and economic effects of their proposed actions. Agencies also provide opportunities for public review and comment on those evaluations.

What is an EIS?

"EIS" is the abbreviation for environmental impact statement, a document prepared to describe the effects of proposed activities on the environment. "Environment," in this case, is defined as the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment. This means that the



"environment" considered in an EIS includes land; water; air; structures; living organisms; environmental values at the site; and social, cultural, and economic factors. An "impact" is a change or consequence that results from an activity. Impacts can be positive or negative, or both. An EIS describes impacts, as well as ways to "mitigate" impacts. To "mitigate" means to lessen or remove negative impacts. Therefore, an EIS is a document that describes the impacts on the environment as a result of a proposed action. It also describes impacts of alternatives, as well as plans to mitigate the impacts.

How were alternatives developed and analyzed?

The alternatives were developed based on issues derived from public comments received on the Notice of Intent to revise the land management plan and the preliminary proposed plan. A draft set of alternatives was developed internally and reviewed during a technical partner meeting. Many of the agreed upon components were incorporated in the draft plan. Other comments were used to build the alternatives that are analyzed in the draft environmental impact statement.

All the alternatives were analyzed in the draft environmental impact statement to determine how they would affect or impact social, cultural, economic, and natural resources within the Tonto National Forest and the broader landscape.

What were the alternatives examined in the draft environmental impact statement?

Four alternatives were developed based on initial public input:

1. The **1985 Forest Plan** – This is the no-action alternative. In this alternative, the 1985 plan was updated to incorporate desired conditions and other required content as identified in the 2012 planning rule (i.e., species of conservation concern, eligible Wild & Scenic Rivers, identifying priority watersheds, and broad-scale monitoring).
2. The **Proposed Draft Forest Plan** – Focuses on restoration and providing diverse ecosystem services. This alternative recognizes and enhances the Tonto National Forest's role in contributing to local economies, including timber and forest products, livestock grazing, the service-based sectors of recreation and tourism, and other multiple-use activities and products. Additionally, it recognizes the importance of partners and volunteers in shared stewardship.
3. **Natural Processes Emphasis** – Responds to public comments that forest management should emphasize natural processes with reduced human disturbance to benefit ecological resources. This alternative includes less reliance on mechanical thinning to reach vegetation desired conditions and improve wildlife habitat. Amenities or infrastructure for human uses are reduced, although uses themselves are not limited
4. **Human Uses Emphasis** – Increases access and commodity utilization. This alternative does not recommend any new wilderness areas, includes a heavier reliance on mechanical thinning to reach vegetation desired conditions, and increased amenities and infrastructure for human uses.



What does the EIS process consist of?

The publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI), stating the agency's intent to prepare an EIS for a particular proposal, kicks off the EIS process. The NOI is published in the Federal Register, and provides some basic information on the proposed action in preparation for the scoping process. The scoping process is the best time to identify issues, determine points of contact, establish project schedules, and provide recommendations to the agency. The overall goal is to define the scope of issues to be addressed in depth in the analyses that will be included in the EIS.

Agencies then submit a draft EIS for public comment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publishes a Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register informing you and other members of the public that the draft is available for comment. The comment period is at least 45 days long; however, it may be longer based on requirements spelled out in the agency specific NEPA procedures or at the agency's discretion. The plan revision process requires a 90-day comment period following the Notice of Availability (NOA) of our Draft Forest Plan and Draft EIS. During this time, the agency may conduct public meetings or hearings as a way to solicit comments. The agency will also request comments from other Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies that may have jurisdiction or interest in the matter

One key aspect of a draft EIS is the statement of the underlying purpose and need. The purpose and need statement explains to the reader why an agency action is necessary, and serves as the basis for identifying the reasonable alternatives that meet the purpose and need. In addition to the purpose and need, identification of reasonable alternatives, and the environmental effects of the alternatives, the draft EIS will contain a description of the environment that would be affected by the various alternatives.

When the public comment period is finished, the agency analyzes comments, conducts further analysis as necessary, and prepares the final EIS. In the final EIS, the agency must respond to the substantive comments received from other government agencies and from members of the public. The response can be in the form of changes in the final EIS, factual corrections, modifications to the analyses or the alternatives, new alternatives considered, or an explanation of why a comment does not require the agency's response.

When it is ready, the agency will publish the final EIS and EPA will publish a NOA in the Federal Register. The NOA marks the start of a waiting period, which is a minimum of 30 days that must pass before the agency can make a decision.

The Record of Decision is the final step for agencies in the EIS process. The ROD is a document that states what the decision is; identifies the alternatives considered, including the environmentally preferred alternative; and discusses mitigation plans, including any enforcement and monitoring commitments. In the ROD, the agency discusses all the factors, including any considerations of national policy that were contemplated when it reached its decision on whether to, and if so how to, proceed with the proposed



action. The ROD will also discuss if all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted, and if not, why they were not.

How were federally recognized tribes included in this process?

Tribal consultation and collaboration has been ongoing since the revision process began, including formal consultation with an additional 13 tribes and attending yearly roundtables between the tribe and the Tonto. The plan revision process is a unique opportunity for tribes to influence the long-term vision for the Tonto National Forest and to strengthen the unique government-to-government relationship that the Forest values.

How does the draft forest plan address the need to support the local economy?

Under the draft forest plan, management actions are estimated to support approximately 3,298 jobs and \$174.1 million in labor income. Recreational activities under the proposed plan support an estimated average of 535 recreation related annual jobs and \$20 million in recreation labor income. Grassland restoration and improved range infrastructure promotes herbaceous cover to maintain sustainable forage production for livestock grazing that contributes to agricultural business and local employment and maintain stocking levels. Finally, mechanical vegetation treatment objectives under the proposed plan increase the production of sawtimber and fuelwood, increasing timber production related local employment (62 jobs) and labor income (\$3.5 million annually). Growth in any of these sectors under the draft worth mentioning or highlighting?

How will the draft forest plan support ecosystem resilience?

Returning natural disturbance processes to the forest is a major focus in the revised land management plan. There is plan direction to maintain or restore vegetation and ecosystem structure in fire-adapted ecosystems through the use of planned and natural fires (125,000 to 649,000 acres over a 10 year period) and silvicultural practices (50,400 to 124,000 acres over a 10 year period). Objectives to return vegetation to reference conditions in frequent-fire adapted ecosystems will reduce uncharacteristic wildland fires, protect life, property, improve wildlife habitat, and cultural and ecological resources.

How does the draft forest plan support the persistence of at-risk and native species?

The Tonto National Forest is consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as required by law, to determine what impacts the plan may have on federally listed plants and wildlife. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide the Tonto National Forest with a biological opinion to disclose those findings.



Additionally, the draft forest plan will guide management of vegetation and aquatic habitats to provide the ecological conditions to support plant and animal species, provide direction on the management of invasive species, and emphasize habitat connectivity and wildlife-friendly infrastructure.

The Tonto National Forest has identified 51 species of conservation concern and 19 federally listed species for which there is substantial concern about their capability to persist over the long term in the plan area. Species of conservation concern and federal listed species are considered at-risk species. The draft forest plan contains plan components that provide for the persistence and viability of at-risk species within the plan area.

How will the draft forest plan protect key ecosystem services?

Ecosystems on the Tonto National Forest provide many benefits to people; due in part to the features and landscapes found on the forest. The Tonto National Forest identified five key ecosystem services supported within the plan area. Ecosystem services are the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems. They are a product of functioning ecosystems that affect social, cultural, and economic conditions both on the forest and the broader landscape. The key ecosystem services on the Tonto include: water for recreation; water for consumption; habitat for hunting, fishing, and watchable wildlife; sustainable and productive rangelands; and cultural heritage. These key ecosystem services were considered throughout the development of plan components for all forest resources. Specific desired conditions and other plan components were developed in order to ensure their availability in the future.

Under the draft forest plan, how will the Forest manage recommended wilderness?

Land management plan direction for recommended wilderness will protect and maintain the ecological and social characteristics that provide the basis for the recommendation. Motorized uses will be allowed but limited to those necessary for emergencies, resource protection, or maintenance of authorized improvements. Mechanized uses will be allowed in this area unless these uses would result in long term degradation of wilderness characteristics. Natural processes and disturbances will function with minimal human influence, with management activities limited to those that move the area toward desired conditions, preserve wilderness characteristics, uphold federal laws and regulations, and protect public health and safety within and adjacent to the recommended wilderness area.

Under the draft forest plan, how will the Forest manage recreation?

The Tonto is one of the most visited national forests, hosting more than 3 million visitors annually. There is easy access for intensive day-use activities and the rugged backcountry offers challenges and solitude. Sustainable recreation management is emphasized in the draft plan and will provide high-quality recreation experiences while balancing changing uses and trends.



Public comments expressed desires for a variety of recreational opportunities. Alternative C focuses on promoting more primitive recreation or non-motorized opportunities. Alternative D focuses on accessible recreation and an increase in motorized opportunities. Direction on managing recreation activity mitigates user conflict and resource damage, while focusing on dispersed recreation sites and well-maintained developed recreation sites.

Under the draft forest plan, how will the Forest support traditional and cultural ways of life?

Plan components have been incorporated into the draft plan to continue to provide traditional uses, such as sustainable grazing, fuelwood, and other forest products. Resources and access to resources are maintained for tribes' cultural and traditional needs, subsistence practices, and economic support.

Direction on tribal relations and partnerships describes a collaborative vision of Forest management and supports the needs and uses of tribal traditional communities by encouraging increased communication. The draft forest plan emphasizes relationships between the Tonto National Forest and forest users and communities, including tribal governments and other traditional and rural communities.

How will the transition between the 1985 plan and the draft forest plan take place?

Any decisions made or implemented before adoption of the draft forest plan will use the 1985 plan for guidance regarding management decisions. Any decisions made or implemented after signing the draft forest plan record of decision will be required to use the desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines in the draft forest plan to guide management actions.

What's next?

The notice of availability (NOA) for the draft forest plan and draft environmental impact statement is expected to be published in the Federal Register in December 2019, which will initiate a 90-day comment period. A legal notice announcing the comment period will be published in Arizona Capitol Times. The Tonto National Forest will host six open house meetings, two technical partner meetings, and six public working days during the comment period to answer questions from the public and provide opportunities to comment.

At the end of the 90-day comment period, the agency will review and respond to comments and prepare the final plan, final environmental impact statement, and draft record of decision for release in late 2020.

